

# *Gender Disparity in Behavioral Health Service Utilization in San Diego County*

In April 2012, CASRC and HSRC finalized a Disparities Report, which investigated the county's progress in reducing disparities across racial/ethnic groups. While gender was not a focus of this report, discrepancies emerged with the rates of service utilization between male and female youth clients. In FY10-11, approximately 62% of clients were male and 38% were female in the Children, Youth & Families Behavioral Health Services (CYFBHS) system, in contrast to the adult system in which gender served was more evenly divided. This discrepancy in the CYFBHS system has remained stable for the last five years.

## **FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS**

1. Is this service utilization pattern seen statewide and/or nationwide?
2. What are possible reasons for this service utilization pattern?

## **FINDINGS**

### **1. Is this service utilization pattern seen statewide or nationwide?**

- a. Data collected from 90 system of care sites nationwide indicated that 66% of youth served across those sites were male (Walrath et al., 2009).
- b. According to FY 01-02 California CSI data, 62% of mental health clients ages 0-17 were male. This is equivalent to the rates of behavioral health service utilization in San Diego County.

### **2. What are possible reasons for this service utilization pattern?**

- a. There is some evidence that boys are more likely than girls to have a mental health need (Costello et al., 2003; Howell & McFeeters, 2008).
- b. Boys have a higher rate of externalizing disorders (Pastor & Rueben, 2008), which are easier to identify.
- c. Walrath et al. 2009 suggest that "a higher threshold may exist for recognizing and/or labeling behaviors as symptomatic of mental health problems in girls than in boys. If this is the case, then a campaign to increase awareness of behaviors in girls indicative of mental health problems could then increase and facilitate referrals into treatment for girls."